

Martin Ennals Award 2020

PRESS KIT
February 2020



MARTIN ENNALS AWARD



VILLE DE
GENÈVE

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1. PRESS RELEASE

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL
WEDNESDAY 19 FEBRUARY 20:00 PM GENEVA TIME**

The 2020 Martin Ennals Award for human rights defenders is granted to Huda Al-Sarari, Yemen

Geneva, 19 February 2020 – The Martin Ennals Foundation has granted Huda Al-Sarari, Yemeni lawyer and human rights defender, the 2020 Martin Ennals Award today. Huda was among three women human rights defenders selected as finalists for the Award by a jury of ten of the world’s leading human rights organizations, along with Sizani Ngubane, South Africa, and Norma Librada Ledezma, Mexico.

The 2020 Martin Ennals Award ceremony, co-hosted by the Martin Ennals Foundation and the City of Geneva, was held on Wednesday 19 February, and for the first time in the history of the Award, all three finalists are women.

“Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are subject to the same risks as every human rights defender, but as women, they also face certain forms of violence and violations due to their gender. WHRDs are often stigmatized and ostracized by community leaders, faith-based groups and even family members”, says the Mayor of the City of Geneva, Sandrine Salerno.

“The Martin Ennals Foundation is particularly proud to honour and support three resilient women human rights defenders this year, our laureate Huda Al-Sarari, as well as our two finalists Sizani Ngubane and Norma Librada Ledezma for their achievements. We hope that the award will shed a light on their achievements, and strengthen protection mechanisms around them”, explains Philippe Currat, President of the Board of the Martin Ennals Foundation.

Huda Al-Sarari is a Yemeni lawyer and human rights defender who graduated in Sharia and Law from Aden University. She also holds a masters in Women’s Studies and Development from the Women’s Centre at Aden University. Over the last years, Huda investigated, exposed and challenged the enforced disappearances that occurred as a result of secret prisons run by foreign governments in Yemen where thousands of men and boys have suffered from arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killings. She collected evidence on more than 250 cases of the abuse taking place within those prisons and succeeded in convincing international organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to take up the cause.

“Being a human rights defender in Yemen is extremely challenging, and being a woman makes this even more difficult. In a male-dominated society, I have to prove myself maybe ten times more than a man”, explains Huda.

Despite the threats, defamation campaigns and sacrifices she and her family endured, Huda continues to stand alongside the families of those who have disappeared.

“Receiving the 2020 Martin Ennals Award for human rights defenders means the world to me. It gives me great strength and emboldens me to continue this fight for justice”, she says. “I believe the Award will be incredibly important in drawing attention to the continual plight of victims of arbitrary detention, abuse and torture in Yemen”, she concludes.

Hans Thoolen, Chair of the Martin Ennals Award Jury, says: “We commend Huda for the work that she conducted, not only against the backdrop of the ongoing Yemeni civil war, but also, in a country where women still struggle to express their political and civil rights. Huda’s legacy is crucial as her thorough investigations and search for accountability will serve to bring justice for human rights violations occurred during the conflict.”

The two finalists of the Martin Ennals Award this year are Sizani Ngubane (South Africa) and Norma Librada Ledezma (Mexico). Sizani is a human rights defender who advocates for land rights for women in rural areas on South Africa. She also supports women to access education, and fights for the end of the traditional practice of Ukuthwala, which is the abduction and forced marriage of young girls and women. Norma is the founder of Justicia para Nuestras Hijas. She has supported over 200 investigations into cases of femicide, enforced disappearance and human trafficking in Chihuahua, Mexico. Both were praised by the Martin Ennals Jury member organisations for their commitment and tremendous achievements in their respective countries.

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Notes to editors

- The City of Geneva has hosted the Award ceremony since 2008, together with the Martin Ennals Foundation, as part of its deep commitment to the defense of human rights. The support of the City, by means of its Service for International Solidarity, reflects its mission to promote human rights both internationally and locally.
- The Jury of the Martin Ennals Award is comprised of ten of the world’s leading human rights organizations: Amnesty International, FIDH, Human Rights First, HURIDOCS, International Service For Human Rights, Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World), Front Line Defenders, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists and the World Organization Against Torture.
- Learn more about the Martin Ennals Foundation: www.martinennalsaward.org
- Follow the Martin Ennals Foundation: [@martinennals](https://twitter.com/martinennals) - [@MartinEnnals](https://facebook.com/MartinEnnals) - [@The Martin Ennals Foundation](https://linkedin.com/company/the-martin-ennals-foundation)
- Our hashtags: #MartinEnnals #MartinEnnalsAward #HumanRightsDefenders #WHRDs
- Hashtags for Huda: #HudaAISarari #Yemen #Yemencantwait #ArbitraryDetentions #ForcedDisappearances

Since its creation in 1993, The Martin Ennals Foundation’s mission is to provide support to human rights defenders so they can pursue their causes, through a financial prize, international recognition and learning opportunities for professional and personal growth. The Martin Ennals Award for human rights defender honours individuals who have shown outstanding commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, despite the risks involved. This award aims to shed a light on their situation and their causes.

Press Contact

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2. THE FINALISTS

Huda Al-Sarari (Yemen)



Huda Al-Sarari is a Yemeni lawyer and human rights activist. She graduated in Sharia and Law from Aden University in 2011 and holds a masters in Women's Studies and Development from the Women's Centre at Aden University.

She has been working for more than a decade with numerous local Yemeni human rights organisations such as the Yemeni Women's Union, the Adalah Centre for

Rights and Freedoms and the National Committee to Investigate Allegations of Human Rights Violations.

Over the last years, she investigated, exposed and challenged the network of secret prisons run by foreign governments in Yemen since 2015, where thousands of men and boys suffered arbitrary detention and torture.

Huda Al-Sarari collected evidence on more than 250 cases of abuse taking place within the prisons and succeeded in convincing international organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to take up the cause.

Despite the threats, defamation campaigns and sacrifices she and her family endured, she continues to stand alongside the families of those who have disappeared and pursue justice. In October 2019, she was honoured as a co-finalist by the Aurora Prize.

'It is particularly difficult to defend human rights in the context of the conflict raging in Yemen and even more difficult to obtain concrete results. Huda Al-Sarari is one of the few people to achieve that,' underlined **Brian Dooley of Human Rights First**

'Huda Al Sarari has chosen not to leave Yemen. That is a decision which shows a rare courage, all the more so as she is working in a high-risk context and a source of danger for herself' declared **Alice Mogwe of the FIDH**.

Norma Ledezma (Mexico)



Norma Librada Ledezma began her career as a human rights defender the day her daughter, Paloma, disappeared on her way home from school in Chihuahua, Mexico.

Since that moment, Norma has dedicated herself to seeking justice for the families and victims of femicide, disappearance and human trafficking in Mexico.

She is one of the founders and Director of Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas, a local organisation that offers legal counsel and support to ongoing cases. She is a member of the Board of the Centre for Justice for Women of Chihuahua, the Consultative Assembly of the Executive Committee for Victim's Redress, and Deputy Coordinator of the Committee for Prevention and Redress of Domestic and Gender-based Violence.

Norma has supported over 200 investigations into cases of femicide and disappearances, on behalf of both male and female victims. As a party in the case over her daughter's murder, which was brought before the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, Norma is responsible for the creation of a Special Prosecutor for Women Victims of Violence in her native state of Chihuahua. In spite of having received numerous death threats, she continues with her human rights work.

'Mexico is at the same time both a democratic country offering judicial remedies and a brutal country where 98% of the innumerable cases of enforced disappearances and torture go unpunished', commented **Gerald Staberock of the OMCT** in a critical remark.

'Norma Ledezma has received numerous death threats, but she is not daunted and continues her work seeking not only to obtain justice for the murder of her daughter, but for all the young women who have been murdered,' noted **Andrew Anderson of Frontline Defenders**.

Sizani Ngubane (South Africa)



Sizani Ngubane is a South African activist who has dedicated her life to promoting gender equality, fighting for women's and indigenous people's rights.

After her initial career as an activist with the ANC, she became Provincial Coordinator of the SA Women's National Coalition in 1991 and contributed to the development of the Women's Charter for Effective Equality in South Africa. That contribution was instrumental in building the section on rural and indigenous women of the Bill of Rights within the South African Constitution.

In 1998, Sizani founded the Rural Women's Movement (RWM), a unique organisation striving against gender-based violence and for women's access to land, education, land rights, property and inheritance rights in courts operating under customary law.

Recently, she is focused on fighting against traditional courts legislation, such as the Ingonyama Trust, which could lead to the misappropriation of many families' land in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

'The misappropriation of very large tracts of lands is done under the cover of customary law in Kwa Zulu Natal. Local people, and women in particular, are victims of this situation,' commented **Gisella Reina of Huridocs** in a critical remark.

'Sizani Ngubane's work has greatly advanced the rights of women and girls in South Africa over more than 40 years,' underlined **Guadalupe Marengo of Amnesty International**.

3. THE MARTIN ENNALS AWARD - FAQs

What is the Martin Ennals Award?

The Martin Ennals Award, managed by a non-profit foundation of the same name, rewards human rights defenders each year from all across the world who distinguish themselves through their deep commitment to human rights - often at the risk of their own lives. Since its creation in 1992, the Award has honoured 44 human rights defenders from more than 20 countries.

To whom is the award given?

The Martin Ennals Award honours three persons (one laureate and two finalists) who defend and promote human rights, in their personal capacity or collectively. They include lawyers, bloggers, civil society activists and even a Buddhist monk.

What is the aim of the Award?

The Award is meant for human rights defenders in urgent need of protection, be they in jail or threatened with imprisonment, because they are barred from doing their job or have gone missing, as is the case of Razan Zaitouneh, a Syrian activist who was a 2016 Martin Ennals finalist. The Award seeks to protect these defenders by highlighting their work, including through the media, and by mobilising international support for them. Conferral of the Award is accompanied by significant advocacy and outreach activities in favour of the human rights defender concerned.

What are the criteria on which the jury bases its decision?

The jury is guided by the determination and commitment to non-violent means shown by the human rights defenders selected, as well as the courage they demonstrate in their work, in spite of the attacks, threats and harassment they face.

How often is the Award made?

The Award has been given out once a year since 1994. Since then, human rights defenders of different backgrounds and nationalities (Mexico, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Burundi, United Arab Emirates, etc.) have been honoured.

Who are the members of the jury?

The jury is made up of representatives of ten of the world's leading human rights organisations. They are: Amnesty International, Bread for the World, the International Commission of Jurists, the FIDH, Front Line Defenders, Human Rights First, Human Rights Watch, HURIDOCS, the World Organisation against Torture and the International Service for Human Rights. In order to reflect the cultural and geographic diversity of the human rights movement, a global network of regional human rights organisations consults with the selection process.

What does the laureate receive? What about the other finalists?

The laureate receives 50,000 Swiss francs intended to support his or her work in the field of human rights. The two other finalists receive 20,000 Swiss francs each for the same purpose. However, the importance of this award to human rights defenders is not restricted to its financial aspect. The international recognition and credibility of the Martin Ennals Award contributes to their protection, as does the support of prominent figures such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the City of Geneva and the Republic and Canton of Geneva and other partner organisations.

What impact does the award have on the fate of the laureates and finalists?

A survey conducted among the network of Martin Ennals human rights defenders showed that several of the former finalists and winners experienced a significant improvement to their security as a result of the award. Among the laureates from earlier awards, Abdul Aziz Muhamat (Sudan) welcomed the attention brought by his nomination to the plight of refugees and asylum seekers stranded on Manus Island and Nauru for the past nearly six years. Unfortunately, the situation of many human rights defenders remains critical: finalists and laureates are still in prison today. This is the case of Ahmed Mansoor (UAE), Nasrin Sotoudeh (Iran) and the Uyghur leader Ilham Tohti (China). Cao Shunli (China) died after being denied the medical care she needed while in detention.

Who is financing the Martin Ennals Award?

The Award is actively supported by the City of Geneva, which organises the award ceremony and allocates funds to the three finalists. The Martin Ennals Foundation also receives funding from the Republic and Canton of Geneva, from Switzerland, the Netherlands, Ireland, Liechtenstein, The Norwegian Human Rights Fund and Bread for the World. In addition, various private and institutional donors contribute to the Martin Ennals Foundation's activities on a regular or an occasional basis.

Who was Martin Ennals?

Martin Ennals was a British human rights activist. He was Secretary General of Amnesty International from 1968 to 1980. During his tenure, the organisation was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the Erasmus Prize and the United Nations Human Rights Prize. Martin Ennals also contributed to the creation of two additional non-governmental organisations: ARTICLE19 and International Alert. The Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders was created in 1992 to pay him tribute. It was officially launched in June 1993, in Vienna, at the World Conference on Human Rights. The first Martin Ennals Award laureate was Harry Wu (China) the following year.

What is the role of the City of Geneva?

The City of Geneva is an active supporter of the Martin Ennals Award since 2005. This partnership forms part of the City's policy of support to the international side of Geneva, bringing the latter closer to the local Geneva, and its policy of international solidarity. The City of Geneva is committed to furthering human rights in Switzerland and throughout the world, in particular through the activity of the Délégation Genève Ville Solidaire. The Martin Ennals Award, which over the years has become one of the main awards for human rights defenders worldwide, makes it possible to fulfil those various objectives. As co-organiser of the Award event since 2008, the City funds the award evening and also gives an annual grant to support the work of the three finalists.

4. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Martin Ennals Awards Evening

The award ceremony and the announcement of the 2020 Laureate will take place on 19 February 2020 at 6 p.m. in the Salle Communale de Plainpalais (Geneva - Switzerland), in the presence of the three finalists, the members of the jury and the Martin Ennals Foundation as well as municipal, cantonal and federal Swiss authorities.

The event, organised by the City of Geneva, is open to the public. In order to make it possible for an international audience to participate, the event is also livestreamed.

All the details on the evening's event is available here: www.martinennalsaward.org

5. CONTACT

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